

wondrous State nurseries, kitchens, and laundries, that were going to liberate women from domestic into industrial drudgery never materialised. The children's homes in existence were for the most part death traps.

In any case, official attitudes changed in the early thirties and the second phase of the assault began. By 1936 divorce was virtually abolished and abortion banned. With the bloodletting of collectivisation behind him and the purges ahead of him, Stalin could not afford to have women aborting potential citizens. In an article in *Trud* he explained that the question of children was far too important to be left to the parents themselves. It had to be decided by the State. Many of the ideologues of the family may well agree with him, although they would probably substitute "society" for the State. Incidentally, Stalin introduced another law that might appeal to those who think the young have got out of hand: he lowered the age of capital punishment to 12.

One cannot pretend that a system which encourages family members to report on each other and denies it the fundamental right of making decisions about children can be said to value it, though women's domestic role was glorified. Stalin, however, recognised that the family could be used to control individuals and to construct the sort of society he

wanted. There were other interesting aspects to the Stalinist family. Illegitimacy did become a matter for shame. It was marked on the birth certificate and in a country where this document had to be presented rather often one could not get away from the knowledge of it. The shame was entirely the child's and the mother's. An edict in 1944 made it quite clear that fathers had no responsibility. There were no welfare provisions and no new housing. Young couples stayed with their in-laws because there was nowhere else to go and consequently family goodwill was strained to the utmost. Unfortunately there were rather a lot of single mothers who lived in mortal fear of shame and ostracism if anybody found out where their husbands had disappeared to.

In the fifties and sixties divorce and abortion became possible and the numbers of both shot up catastrophically. Clearly all those years of family creation by decree had not encouraged an organic growth of it. However, one thing has to be said: through a combination of legal semi-discrimination, a certain prudishness, and lack of privacy, the illegitimacy rate went down. Whether all this social engineering that ostensibly preserved the family created a cohesive society in which people feel any lasting loyalties is more questionable.

## IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Avedon Carol

It's a funny thing. During the six years that Feminists Against Censorship has existed, the debate on censorship — particularly of pornography — has opened up considerably. When we first got together, it seemed like you couldn't question the issue at all — pornography was just plain bad, and censorship was the answer to all problems. The first members of FAC to speak in public were barely allowed to utter a word, so quickly were they pounced on by "feminist" opponents who assumed that anyone who would defend the freedom of expression of pornographers could only be an evil exploiter of blacks and women. That situation no longer pertains.

Yet at the same time, the government seems to have become increasingly rabid about suppressing sexual material, and the Labour Party is right behind it in calling for stricter laws and enforcement. Rhetoric and lies about the prevalence of violent pornography and child porn just heats up more and more, along with increases in false claims about new agreement from academics that pornography and violent material are proven to be harmful. These are accompanied by slanders of those who dispute such claims; thus Guy Cumberbatch, author of the Home Office's 1990 report on pornography, which found that there was no evidence linking pornography and violence, is dismissed as having been "pro-porn" to start with ( a favourite tactic of the National Viewers and Listeners Association), and anti-porn "feminists" have been telling journalists that Feminists Against Censorship's literature "advocates sex with children and animals." (We're offering a prize to anyone who can find this passage in any of our texts, by the way.)

That in itself would be no problem, but the government seems to need no reason at all further to strengthen the position against pornography in law. For

example, it has recently begun moves to ban reception of non-terrestrial television broadcasts of sexual material from continental Europe, despite the fact that the relevant authorities have received not one single complaint about the sex TV channels. And Virginia Bottomley seems to be announcing yet another crackdown on "pornography" (whatever that may mean) almost weekly.

The private sector has been nothing if not helpful. The established soft core publishers themselves have no love for their more adventurous colleagues and are rumoured to be the primary source of "tips" to the police about smaller publishers or distributors who *may* be breaching the Obscene Publications Acts — in other words, the law appears to be in use by them to stamp out possible competition. Meanwhile, Boots the Chemist and Kodak are notifying the police when they think your rolls of film contain material that might transgress the law, or at least the strictures of the most puritanical version of morality.

Normally, the tabloids are not merely behind the government and the police in such campaigns, but actually lead them. It would not be going too far to say that *The Daily Mail* and *News of the World* are the real legislative bodies in this country. The *Mail* has been the principal campaigner against the Playboy Channel and TV Erotica, despite the fact that the public in general has shown no interest in seeing those channels banned.

But when TV presenter Julia Somerville was dragged to the police station in late 1995 after Boots reported that she and her partner had brought "child porn" to them to be developed, the tabloids got it right for once, refusing to be taken in by the prurient assumption that any photo of a nude child could be assumed to be child pornography. The photos, they explained, just showed Somerville's young daughter playing with shaving foam in the bath. In the light of the public response to this, Boots hastily announced that it was Kodak, and not they, who had notified the authorities (and the press) of the photos.

Personally, I was relieved when I saw the headlines. For years I have been telling audiences that this is where the child porn scare has been leading, but by and large people simply refuse to believe that innocent material of this nature is what is drawing the attention of the police. I doubt this means the police themselves will be showing restraint, but at least perhaps now people will believe me when I tell them that you can't trust the guardians of morality to restrict their investigations to real offences against children.

But I wonder how much help it will be to others who have been caught in the trap. Earlier in 1995, a teacher was convicted for possession of child pornography when a copy of a well-known sex education book, *Show Me*, was found in his home. Even I found this remarkable. *Show Me* was released to wide acclaim in the 1970s; it was published in several languages, distributed worldwide, and reviewed favourably by educators and feminists alike. Indeed, I seem to recall *MsMagazine* touting it as heralding a new, enlightened view of sex education for children.

The recent case only confirms my fear that even sex education is going to be buried by the child porn scare. God knows that hardly a season goes by without some new "scandal" in the *Mail* or *News of the World* about some sex educator who had the poor taste to answer a young person's questions honestly. In fact, *News of the World* was outraged when a magazine aimed at pubescent girls actually published an article about menstruation, a subject they felt such girls were too young for!

I've recently heard from some publishers that their photographers are reporting problems with Kodak, who are now refusing to process some of the materials they were happy to develop before, if they have sexual content. You'll have to switch to Fuji, it seems, if you still want to take sexy colour photos.

Meanwhile, the police have been going after kinky people with a vengeance. Clubs for fetishists have been raided repeatedly, as have "gay" clubs, along with small publishers and distributors of erotic materials. In one case the Crown Prosecution Service asked for and received a destruction order on material carried by a small distributor — material that is easily found at W.H. Smith's, including books from Virgin's Nexus line. That's Richard Branson's Virgin, remember.

Needless to say, 1995 was, in the main, a tough year for anti-censorship activists. It wasn't all bad, though — for one thing, two books by anti-censorship feminists were released from major publishers in the States, and shouldn't be too hard to find in the UK.

The first of these, *Defending Pornography* (Scribner — released in the UK by Little Brown) by Nadine Strossen, president of the American Civil Liberties Union, carefully dissects the anti-porn analysis and shows it up for the ultimately sexist and punitive philosophy it really is. Strossen is a legal scholar and carefully documents every claim she makes. There are few more authoritative sources for information on how the porn wars have taken shape, and what it all means. Moreover, Strossen's gives horrifying examples of "feminist" analysis gone mad — my favourite is the quotation from a musicologist who explains that Beethoven's 9th symphony is actually about rape. And Strossen is, unequivocally, a feminist.

The second book is *XXX: A Woman's Right to Pornography* (St. Martin's Press), by well-known individualist feminist Wendy McElroy. In addition to a useful re-statement of the anti-censorship feminist position and an insightful analysis of the Dworkin-MacKinnon anti-porn ordinance, the author provides some invaluable documentation with the results of interviews with the women who really appear in professional pornography. The book does contain a few significant flaws — McElroy virtually ignores the long history of anti-censorship feminism that has always been a part of the movement and was once the *only* feminist position, for one thing, but it is also a mistake to lump all anti-censorship women together as individualists, a description that doesn't sit well when applied to someone like science fiction author (and last time I looked, Marxist) Joanna Russ.

But don't let that stop you. Both of these books are well worth reading, even if you have to order them specially from the US. Put them on your reading list and give yourself a treat.

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## CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

Michael Plumbe

### Surcharging Local Councillors

I was wrong in a recent column in writing that Local Government councillors had **newly** acquired the right to avoid being surcharged if they acted in the belief that the related expenditure in question was authorised by law. A colleague tells me that councillors in fact appear already to have had this right when the Local Government Act of 1972 came in, and that the Local Government Finance Act of 1981/2 repeats the clauses. As far as my colleague knows, these clauses still apply. I quote, and paraphrase, comment or condense in:

"13.-(1) Where it appears to the auditor carrying out the audit of any accounts ... that any item of account is contrary to law he may apply to the court for a declaration that the item is contrary to law except where it is sanctioned by the Secretary of State (S. of S.).

"-(2) On an application under this section the court may [make such a declaration] and (a) order that any person responsible for incurring or authorising any expenditure declared unlawful shall repay it in whole or in part .... (b) ....

"-(3) The court shall not make an order under subsection (2)(a) or (b) above if the court is satisfied that the person responsible for incurring or authorising any such expenditure acted reasonably or in the belief that the expenditure was authorised by law, and in any other case shall have regard to all the circumstances, including that person's means and ability to repay that expenditure or any part of it."

If you or I act illegally, ignorance of the law is no defence. Also I doubt if the court would take much notice of a plea of "reasonableness" or inability to pay. Paradoxically, failure to pay dues to the local Council is about the only "debt offence" for which I can be sent to prison.